

WASHINGTON, DC - House Democratic Whip Steny H. Hoyer (MD) released the following statement today regarding the bipartisan resolution H.Res. 581, which expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that pay adjustments should be the same this year for both civilian and military Federal personnel. The House overwhelmingly supported the bipartisan resolution, with 299 Members voting in support to 126 voting in opposition:

"I am pleased that such a strong bipartisan majority voted to support this bipartisan resolution, which I offered with my Republican colleagues Mr. Tom Davis and Mr. Frank Wolf. This overwhelming vote in support of pay parity sends a strong message to opponents of this important principle as we proceed with our efforts to secure pay parity in the appropriations process.

"This resolution expresses the sense of the House that compensation for civilian and military employees must be sufficient to support our efforts to recruit and retain the best public sector employees and emphasizes the need to embrace the principle of 'pay parity.' The resolution puts the House in harmony with the Senate, which included similar language in its fiscal year 2005 budget.

"Why do I believe that Federal civilian employees and uniformed personnel deserve the same pay adjustment? The answer is simple. Civilian employees and uniformed personnel play complementary and equally critical roles in protecting this nation and promoting the general welfare of its citizens.

"No one can doubt the proposed 3.5% adjustment for the brave women and men of our military is justified. They are doing extraordinary work in Iraq, Afghanistan, and throughout the world protecting and promoting democracy.

"Much the same can be said about the work of our civilian federal employees, yet they would receive a much smaller 1.5% pay adjustment under President Bush's proposal.

"Opponents of pay parity contend that civilian employees do not deserve a 3.5% adjustment because they do not place themselves in harm's way or work on issues affecting national security. They are wrong.

"Civilian federal employees are contributing in obvious and not-so-obvious ways in making this country a safer place to live. Is it right that a CIA officer operating in Afghanistan or Iraq should receive only a 1.5% increase next year because he or she is a Federal civilian employee? Is it fair that an FBI agent working to thwart domestic terrorism should receive only a 1.5% increase next year because he or she happens to be a member of the civilian workforce? Is it just that a researcher at the National Institutes of Health or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention researching ways to combat bio-terrorism should receive only a 1.5% increase next year because he or she works in the civil service?

"Opponents of pay parity draw a false, simplistic, and harmful distinction when they divide the dedicated women and men serving our country into two groups and request larger annual pay increases for one of them. In doing so, they send an unmistakably negative message to our Federal civilian employees: You and your work are not as important.

"That is a signal we cannot afford to send. Unless we do more to recruit, retain, and reward civilian employees, the Federal public sector will experience a personnel crisis in the next decade. Consider the facts:

- * The civilian public-private sector wage gap has been calculated to be as high as 32% in some areas of the country, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- * Only 13% of college graduates said last spring that they had seriously considered working for the Federal government, according to the Brookings Institution.
- * By 2006, 46.5% of Federal employees will be eligible to retire, according to the Office of Personnel Management.

"Fair annual pay adjustments will not by themselves solve the looming personnel crisis. But it is an important part of the solution. We cannot expect to retain or recruit the best and brightest if we fail to pay them wages comparable to those in the private sector.

"For 15 of the last 17 years bipartisan majorities in Congress have helped prevent the pay gap between the public and private sectors from widening by providing civilian federal employees with the same pay raise as that proposed for our uniformed personnel. Indeed, Congress voted as recently as January of this year to provide both our military and civilian federal employees with the same average pay raises for Fiscal Year 2004; 2005 should be no different."

As adopted, the resolution establishes as the policy of the House that the compensation for federal civilian employees in 2005 is to increase at the same 3.5% rate proposed in the President's budget for the uniformed services.

There are 1.8 million civilian federal employees across the country - in the Department of Defense alone there are over 600,000 civilian federal employees. Over the past two decades, both the House and Senate have consistently recognized that Congress and the Executive Branch should not undermine the morale of dedicated Federal public servants by failing to bring their pay adjustments in line with military personnel.

The principle of parity stems from the recognition that the pay for civilian and military employees simply has not kept pace with increases in the private sector. According to the most recent studies, a 32 percent pay gap exists between the civilian employees and their private sector counterparts and an estimated 5.4 percent gap exists between the military service members and the private sector.

###